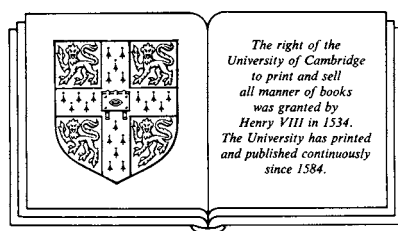


The Armada of Flanders

Spanish Maritime Policy and European War, 1568–1668

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SAILING IN THE DARK

Both as explosive event and as continuing phenomenon, the Revolt of the Netherlands was the fundamental conditioning factor in the experience of Spain's European hegemony. Yet it could not have developed beyond its earliest stages, nor would the unlikely revival of its fortunes spearheaded by the 'Sea-Beggars' in 1572 have stood much chance of success, if Philip II and his ministers had been as assiduous in the creation of a North Sea navy as they were in the establishment of the celebrated army of Flanders. The presence of appropriate Spanish squadrons and bases in the Rhine delta and the Hook of Holland would surely have provided a deterrent, just as their absence acted as an incentive, to the motley heroes of Motley.¹

Having made such a fundamental (and hypothetical) stricture, we must qualify it in several important respects. In fact, the duke of Alba, Philip's governor and military commander in the Low Countries, did dispose of a force which could loosely be called naval in 1572. This mainly comprised small, if numerous, craft – above all, expropriated river barges and sloops, whose routine function was the service and support of essentially terrestrial operations. Even had the duke been willing by temperament to divert his attention from the latter, his resources were hardly suited to the task of policing the dangerous waters to the seaward of the major Dutch islands.²

At a more general level, not for the first nor the last time, part of the explanation for this portentous lapse of Madrid's policy was its intense concentration elsewhere; in this case, on the Mediterranean, an obsession which reasserted itself in Madrid, once Alba had won his victories on land and the

¹ For a cogent account of the revolt in the Netherlands, see G. Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London, 1977); and an invigorating treatment of the international scene is given by H. Lapeyre, *Les Monarchies européennes du XVI^e siècle. Les relations internationales* (Paris, 1966). The reference in the text, however, is to J. R. Motley's Classic *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, first published in 1856.

² I have relied in what follows – heavily at times – on the excellent recent narrative compiled directly from AGS documentation by P. Pi Corrales, *Felipe II y la lucha por el dominio del mar* (Madrid, 1989), esp. pp. 112–74. See also, however, J. Cervera Pery, *La estrategia naval del Imperio: Auge, declive y ocaso de la Marina de los Austrias* (Madrid, 1982), pp. 135ff. and R. Cerezo Martínez, *Las Armadas de Felipe II* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 233–54.

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Flemish protest movement seemed to have dissipated itself (1567–68). At exactly that moment, the revolt of the moriscos of the Alpujarras posed a serious danger to Andalusia, demanding two years and a sizeable military effort for its suppression. Success here provided motive and moment for Philip to pour his energies into the Holy League against the Ottoman. A momentous campaign culminated in the brilliant victory of Lepanto (1571). The expense of such commitments seriously debilitated the Treasury, and virtually monopolised the energies of Spain's naval commissariat in the construction and provision of war-galleys. Little wonder that down to 1572, a period during which the local resistance movement seemed in any case to have been asphyxiated by the rigorous measures taken by Alba, the maritime security of the Netherlands did not assume priority.

Having committed this partial oversight, Philip was to find it exceptionally difficult to recover the initiative. Not wholly by design, the rebels had registered a great success by capturing the fishing ports of the west and south coasts of Zeeland. Their hectic progress from Den Briel and Walcheren to the capture of Vlissingen gave them an ideal strategic nexus for rapid diffusion of their influence, along the coasts into Holland in the north, and into the Flanders–Brabant mainland, by means of the multiple waterways which faced them across a safe stretch of water. These gains also provided a perfect base from which to exercise a stranglehold on the communications – whether commercial or military – of Antwerp, the largest city of the Low Countries, and the richest port of western Europe. Above all, the timing of the onslaught was fortuitous to perfection. Only a matter of weeks after the loss of Vlissingen, the duke of Medinaceli docked in Sluis, with an expeditionary force which included a proportion of seagoing vessels (carracks and galleons).³

Immense logistical, technological and provision difficulties lay behind the preparation of Medinaceli's fleet, which seems (nonetheless) to have represented the first large-scale *empresa* to have reached Flanders in a single direct voyage from Spain. Earlier ventures intended to supply military resources to the Netherlands had been able to count on shelter and recuperation in friendly harbours *en route*. The co-operation of England and above all the English possession of Calais, a deepwater port conveniently close to his main theatre of operations, allowed Charles V to utilise the Channel lanes during the wars with France which dominated his last decade in office. The loss of Calais in 1558, for which England's Spanish king was blamed, was actually of greater practical consequence for Spain than it was for England. Moreover, relations between the two countries had deteriorated badly a decade later.⁴

³ Pi Corrales, *Felipe II y la lucha*, pp. 150–1; Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, pp. 131–9.

⁴ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (2 vols., London 1971–2), 1480–4, (citing AGS/E 502 and 504)), itemises seven such voyages between 1544 and 1552. In the 1570s, plans often suggested tackling the logistical problems of the voyage by transferring men and money (say, in the Solent) between the galleons coming from Spain and

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The Medinaceli voyage, chaotic in preparation and sadly disappointing in results, nevertheless showed that despite his other preoccupations, Philip II remained aware of, and (insofar as he could) prepared to cater for, the maritime contingencies of the North Sea. Following the setbacks of 1572 itself, the King reacted in the manner which for several further generations was to characterise the Spanish response to major military disaster. Having now clearly identified the strategic situation obtaining in the Low Countries as essentially maritime, he set in motion the appropriate preparations to stem the tide of rebel successes. With the onslaught of 'les gueux', combined with the simultaneous infiltration of the English 'sea-dogs' into the Caribbean, for the first time Spain's maritime establishment confronted the need to create a large-scale open-sea fleet; and ministers, for their part, faced the equally unprecedented problem of guaranteeing its functioning in the royal service on a permanent basis. In 1573, the count of Olivares recommended the preparation of a fleet of thirty medium-sized galleons for duty in the north. Significantly, it was already recognised in government circles that 'ships of shallow draught [suitable] for operations off the Flemish coast' were essential; in other words that modification and adaptation, if not innovation, in the current design and construction of vessels, was the order of the day.⁵

In the circumstances, this conviction may have been premature. Alba's replacement, Don Luis de Requesens, believed that such a radical change of emphasis was unnecessary, since the galleys used with such success in Mediterranean waters were perfectly suitable for the new theatre of operations. In this, he may have been betraying his Catalan origins – it was said the best galleys were constructed in the dockyards of Don Luis's home principality – but recent local experience seemed to bear him out, and prominent naval authorities supported his instinct for some years to come.⁶ The squadrons of minor sailing vessels which Requesens employed achieved little during the defensive operations involved in the critical siege of Middelburg, the key to Zeeland, in 1573–4. However, the new adviser called in by Philip to consider this emergency was a keen exponent of the Atlantic galleon. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, *conquistador* and first governor of Florida, largely seconded Olivares, only parting from him in advocating use of an even smaller race of galleons, which at first he called *pinazas*. The new naval effort was concentrated in Santander, where it was possible to co-ordinate the resources

smaller ships sent to liaise from Flanders. The former could then return with a reduced risk of the enemy's attentions, as well as avoiding the sandbanks and other inimical North Sea conditions. For Anglo-Spanish relations in this period, see R. B. Wernham, *Before the Armada: The Growth of English Foreign Policy* (London, 1966).

⁵ A. W. Lovett, *Philip II and Mateo Vázquez de Leca: The Government of Spain, 1572–92* (Geneva, 1977), pp. 43–4.

⁶ See below, pp. 11–13.

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and technical experience of the various maritime communities of Spain's northern littoral.⁷

Menéndez's scheme, which fully anticipated the grandiose thinking of Santa Cruz and other subsequent commanders, was for a fleet of 150 ships. He proposed that this should include a squadron of twenty medium-sized galleons (up to 300 tons) to carry the bulk of the 3,000 infantry intended for the reconquest of Zeeland. He hoped to draw on the resources of the Basque Country, whose ships and mariners were practised in the trading run to Antwerp, and had been in charge of the transport of the Emperor's soldiery referred to above. Apparently, Menéndez intended to use his smaller ships as lighters and landing craft in a fully amphibious operation. In the course of 1573–4 a force of over fifty assorted vessels was collected in Santander, mostly by commandeering privately-owned merchant ships in all Spain's major Atlantic ports. Not only was no new building programmed, but Menéndez had to select for his purpose mostly from written lists, without the opportunity to inspect the ships themselves. The crown's finances were already approaching the edges of the disaster which was to overwhelm them the following year, and despite the arrival of Olivares in person with new powers, sufficient credit was never available to provide stability for the project. Even before Menéndez and many of his command succumbed to an outbreak of typhus, crews had deserted and ships had been lost through incompetence and neglect. The expedition never got under way, and much of the energy and resources expended on it was wasted.

The consequent loss of Middelburg, involving that of the entire province of Zeeland, was one of the most ominous setbacks in Spanish imperial history, and one which was never reversed. In the second half of the 1570s, the rebels were virtually unhindered in creating the infrastructures of their future maritime achievements. One by one, the Dutch captured the main ports of Flanders, whereas financial and strategic conditions virtually prohibited any appreciable Spanish recovery at sea. The pleas of Requesens and others for a rationalisation of naval policy went largely unheeded.⁸

Not until the absorption of the Crown of Portugal, with its considerable maritime establishment, was this situation altered. Indeed, the existence of the Portuguese ocean-going fleets, which had patented the use of galleons and guns in the early decades of the century, had been one of the reasons why Spain had

⁷ This account of the Menéndez expedition relies on that of M. Pi Corrales, *España y las potencias nórdicas: 'La otra Invencible', 1574* (Madrid, 1983), esp. pp. 89–138, and 153ff.

⁸ Even Alba, once his return to Spain had enabled him to take a longer perspective of the Low Countries' problem, added his voice to the naval lobby, (I. A. A. Thompson, *War and Government in Habsburg Spain, 1560–1620* (London, 1976), p. 186 and n. 2). Meanwhile, various attempts to get the remnants of Menéndez's fleet to sea in 1575–6 were marked by repeated breakdowns. Before the troop reinforcements left Spain they were often in outright mutiny. See Pi Corrales, *Felipe II y la lucha*, pp. 153ff.

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been slow to develop its own formal naval establishment. Co-operation between the two crowns over security in the Atlantic approaches had become a fairly reliable element in the overall strategic picture. This was welcome, since it meant that Spain could more freely concentrate its resources on the prolonged struggle with the Ottoman empire in the Mediterranean. But it meant that in mid-century little urgency was attached to the construction of galleons, the manufacture of appropriate artillery – in short, to the whole issue of a permanent naval apparatus capable of organising the North Sea–Atlantic dimension. In 1570, the Crown still only disposed of eighteen galleon-type warships – a figure which was no improvement on that of a generation earlier – and at least half of these were normally committed to protecting the American trade-system. On the other hand, Portugal's 'fleet-in-being' had been declining (with the occasional interruption) for fifty years, and in the decade following 1570 slumped from thirty-nine to only eighteen units. This was, therefore, one of the factors which precipitated a decisive Spanish intervention in Portugal when legitimate opportunity offered in 1580. Philip II himself, spending over two years in Lisbon (1581–3), was able to review and assess the relevant resources.⁹

Meanwhile, Alessandro Farnese, duke of Parma, his new lieutenant in the Netherlands, had begun a campaign of steady pressure on the frontier positions of the rebel union. The Portuguese windfall was complemented in 1583 by Parma's recapture of Dunkirk, an awkward harbour, it is true, but one which might suffice as a base for warships, and the reception of fleets from Spain. In any case, with neither Sluis nor Ostend yet in his hands, Farnese had little choice if he wished to add a naval dimension to his plans for the reconquest of the north. Shortly after taking the port, he transferred thence the moribund naval council from Gravelines, and by the issue of new ordinances in effect created the first admiralty organisation of the Spanish Netherlands.¹⁰

Tradition traced the origins of naval authority in Flanders to Roman times; and it is true that even in the Habsburg era, Charles V had founded an admiralty in 1540 in order to 'faire negotiations et hoy porveoir contre les Pyrates de Mer'.¹¹ Not only, as this implies, was the organisation devoted mainly to defence of the growing commercial activity of the Netherlands, but it can also be regarded in constitutional terms as a revival of earlier Burgundian jurisdiction. The new admiralty of 1583 was in part run by Spaniards, whilst an indication of rapid alteration in the commercial balances of the North Sea nexus can be seen

⁹ See G. Modelski and W. R. Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494–1993* (London, 1988), esp. pp. 62–3, 151–7 and 174–5. This major quantitative study of 'great-power navies' came to my attention too late for full consideration of its contents. However, I hope in a future survey of Spain's maritime culture to give closer attention to its thesis that Portugal was the original 'world' naval power, whereas Spain was merely one of the 'unsuccessful aspirants' to such a title.

¹⁰ J. Bolsée, *Inventaire des Archives des Conseils et Sièges d'Amirauté* (Tongres, 1932), pp. 152–3; G. Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 83–4.

¹¹ From an eighteenth-century ms. history of the Burgundian Admiralty in BRB/16028–37, f. 1.

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in the fact that, almost from the start, Dunkirk was utilised as a base for offensive operations. From Dunkirk, Parma was able to tighten his purchase on Sluis, which eventually capitulated in 1587. Moreover, privateering against heretic commerce had quickly become a feature of the port. In 1586, for example, William Colston, merchant of Bristol, sailing to Vlissingen, was captured by Dunkirkers and forced to ransom himself on the high seas for £600.¹²

During the preparations for the Enterprise of England in 1587–8, Parma's naval apparatus was vastly augmented. With the fall of Sluis, at Philip's orders, Parma set about collecting all the riverine and coasting vessels he could get his hands on, as well as embargoing larger craft in Antwerp, hiring merchant ships from Hamburg and other German ports and building new boats in Dunkirk.¹³ Huge numbers of temporary officials, agents and sailors were recruited in the loyal zone. By the spring of 1588, Parma had over 300 assorted vessels, most of them in excellent condition, standing by in the ports of Flanders to transport an army of 25,000 as far as the coast of Kent.¹⁴ Though emphatically a matter of speculation, it is possible that amongst Parma's forces were enough warships combining manoeuvrable dimensions with firepower to stand off an attack by the Dutch fleet which had been mobilised to deal with it. Be this as it may, when the climactic moment of the campaign arrived, the duke was unwilling to commit so much to such a lottery, especially when not required to do so by advance instruction. Quite simply, the chances of success were not high enough to justify the appalling consequences of failure. Neither the armada of Flanders, nor the Dutch navy which in future years constituted its main opponent, therefore participated actively in the most celebrated naval campaign of history.¹⁵

The decade following the disaster of the Invincible witnessed the steady emergence of a coherent Spanish naval policy. Of course, the objective was distorted in many respects by Philip II's residual determination to carry out the punishment of England by *force majeure* and the continual wastage of maritime resources that this entailed.¹⁶ The formation of a home waters fleet, influenced

¹² J. Vanes (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century* (Bristol, 1979), pp. 72–3. (I owe this reference to Mr Ian Scott.)

¹³ Philip II to marquis of Santa Cruz, (?Jan. 1588), MMG/PHB 1b, ff. 444–5.

¹⁴ Details in F. Riaño Lozano, *Los medios navales de Alejandro Farnesio (1587–1588)*, (Madrid, 1989), esp. pp. 229–36. See also H. O'Donnell y Duque de Estrada, *La Fuerza de desembarco de la Gran Armada contra Inglaterra (1588)* (Madrid, 1989), esp. pp. 395–400.

¹⁵ Three excellent general discussions of the Enterprise of England appeared during the anniversary of 1988, all of them adding some fresh dimension to the theme: C. Martin and G. Parker, *The Spanish Armada* (Cambridge); F. Fernández-Armesto, *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588* (Oxford); and C. Gómez-Centurión, *La Invencible y la empresa de Inglaterra* (Madrid). Parma's agglomeration of 1588 fell within the administrative ambit of the official staff of the Flanders Admiralty. For all its ephemeral existence and frustrated purpose, technically it must be regarded as a part of the present history, though one which, in the circumstances, seems to require no further exposition within its pages.

¹⁶ A single-volume treatment in English of the post-1588 attempts to refloat the *empresa de Inglaterra* is still useful: W. Graham, *Spanish Armadas* (London, 1970), although it has now been superseded in terms of detail by Pi Corrales (*Felipe II y la lucha*). If perhaps somewhat light on

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in part by Drake's ambitious landing in Galicia in 1589, which, although it ended in fiasco, sent a tremor through Spain, was the most significant feature of this development. By 1590, Pedro de Zubiaur had formed a squadron of northern *flibotes* and Spanish *galeoncetes* as the beginnings of a permanent *Armada del Mar Océano* based at Lisbon and Cadiz.¹⁷ An administrative structure emerged, derived from the experience of existing mechanisms such as the galley fleets and the Atlantic convoy guards. The distinguished naval historian, J. S. Corbett, perceived a century ago that – contrary to the ingrained assumptions of English tradition – 1588 marked the beginning of the Spanish Armada rather than its end.¹⁸ In 1976, I. A. A. Thompson supported the conclusions of Corbett's great Spanish contemporary, César Fernández Duro, that the 1590s were the crucial decade in the formation of the Monarchy's first permanent naval organisation outside the Mediterranean. A native shipbuilding programme was sponsored by the Crown, and some seventy new Spanish galleons were produced by the end of the reign.¹⁹

The Spanish System was slowly conforming to its final character as a geopolitical instrument of continuing war, with long-term strategic perspectives which conditioned tactical thinking. The experience of defeat, by the Dutch rebels in the 1570s, by the English in 1588 and by the French in the 1590s, each in their different ways highlighting the problems of seaborne empire, had brought about this crucial adaptation. Maritime developments in Flanders fully reflected this enforced, but nonetheless enhancing, maturity of outlook.

FULL DRESS REHEARSAL

The years between the death of Parma and the arrival of the Archduke Albert (1592–96) were a period of stagnation in the government of the Spanish Netherlands. Naval policy – or rather its absence – merely reflected the general situation, as Philip II sought to extricate himself from the toils of over-commitment against the new Bourbon regime in France, and the army of Flanders satisfied itself with consolidating the territory Farnese had regained. The main effort of the Admiralty was devoted to the increasingly dangerous task

analysis and interpretation, the latter nevertheless conveys a convincing impression of the besetting failures of Philippine naval strategy at the microcosmic level, both before and after 1588.

¹⁷ F. Olesa Muñido, *La organización naval de los Estados Mediterráneos y en especial de España durante los siglos XVI y XVII* (2 vols. Madrid 1968), I, 266. It seems likely that Zubiaur used as the nucleus of this squadron the 'flibotes' (= *fluitschipen*) purchased by Parma for the Flanders armada in 1587–8.

¹⁸ J. S. Corbett, *The Successors of Drake* (London, 1900), p. vi; the assertion was even admitted by A. L. Rowse in *The Expansion of England* (London, 1930), p. 308.

¹⁹ Thompson, *War and Government*, pp. 190–94. Fernández Duro's *Armada española desde la Unión de los Reinos de Castilla y Aragón* (9 vols., Madrid, 1895–1903) is still a basic work of reference, especially (though not only) on periods and themes not yet re-addressed by modern historiography.

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of convoying merchant ships along the Scheldt, running the gauntlet of rebel ambush at every bend. Its main force was therefore stationed at Antwerp, while little attention seems to have been paid to the Flanders ports and their potential for larger operations. Indeed, once the city of Antwerp was regarded as reasonably secure, the seat of the Admiralty was moved there from Dunkirk (1593).²⁰

The removal of Parma himself and the death of the armada's main commander and dominant figure, the marquis de Renty in (1590) resulted in a loss of discipline and stability at the administrative level. The senior Spanish representative, Fernando de Salinas, and his cousin, the *depositario* Diego de Peralta, were involved in a prolonged quarrel with the Opmeer brothers (Pieter and Lucas), which split the Conseil Suprême down the middle and paralysed naval affairs. The latter were amongst the most prominent members of the rapidly dwindling Antwerp merchant community. Pieter himself was *fiscal* (attorney) of the Council, while Salinas had been a close aid of Parma's and *comisario general* of the armada. Mutual accusations of corruption in the supply contracts of the fleet led in 1594 to a heated exchange during a council-meeting, at which swords were nearly drawn. When Albert took up his new post in 1596, the affairs of the Admiralty were in serious need of his attention.²¹

The Archduke's reforms and reconstitution succeeded in settling, if not healing, the Council's wounds. The two factions, which clearly represented a clash between powerful local interests and intrusive Spanish officials, remained established on the Council. But while indigenous interests now dominated, both numerically and in terms of status, Salinas for his part was allocated a more prominent role as policymaking adviser to Albert. From the first, the new governor seems to have displayed gifts of compromise, in which native sensibilities were protected, and a positive contribution to affairs thereby encouraged. Doubtless the Archduke's highly relevant experience as viceroy of Portugal exerted its influence, not only on his political skills, but on his interest in the maritime dimension of the new office. In any case – a result doubtless further stimulated by the allocation of a regular budget – the operational activity and strategic influence of the Flanders navy increased with almost immediate effect.²²

In 1598, Martín de Bertendona arrived in Dunkirk from Spain with a flotilla

²⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the Flanders Admiralty in the period covered by the present chapter, see F. Pollentier, *De Admiraliteit en de oorlog ter zee onder de Aartshertogen (1596–1609)* (Brussels, 1972). This is essentially an institutional study, based wholly on the records of the Brussels archives. The accounts of *depositario* Peralta, 1592–8, AGS/CMC 1826 no. 1, indicate that the main income of the Admiralty derived from convoy fees paid in Antwerp. For the careful maintenance of the river patrols, see the series of accounts for 1599–1607 in *ibid.* 3258 and BRB/12622–31, f. 472.

²¹ For Opmeer's brief against Salinas, see ARB/CP 1108. The quarrel had flared up again in February, 1595.

²² BRB/16038–7, ff. 64–70. The annual minute books of the new council from 1595–1601 are in ARB/CA 5–9.

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of (converted) warships for incorporation into the armada, along with a large supply of ordnance made available as a result of the ending of the war with France.²³ In the opening months of the new reign of Philip III, lists of prizes and captives in the three ports of Dunkirk, Gravelines and Nieuwpoort demonstrate the higher profile of the fleet.²⁴ Around this time it was commanded by Antoine de Bourgoigne, count of Waecken, sailing in the *St Albert*, a ship of 160 tons and sixteen guns which fits the description, shortly to be widespread, of a Dunkirk 'frigate'.²⁵ In 1600, apparently for the first time, two substantial warships were constructed in Dunkirk for the armada, though they were only fitted out and made seaworthy with some difficulty.²⁶ The same year, however, Waecken led fourteen armada ships in a successful raid on the Dutch fishing fleet.²⁷

The logic of commerce raiding against a growing, and thus increasingly vulnerable, rebel mercantile system, was beginning to make an impact on Spanish strategic thought. In 1593, Federigo Spínola, promising heir to the complementary traditions of Hispano-Genoese collaboration – banking fortune and maritime genius – put forward a scheme for an offensive against Dutch trade, using a galley-fleet based in Flanders.²⁸ Around the same time, dozens of Basque shipowners in the deep-sea fishing industry, many of them forced into redundancy as a result of forceful Dutch encroachment, began to apply for patents as corsairs, in order to prey in revenge on their rivals' trade with France. By the end of the century a thriving privateering industry had sprung up in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, naturally encouraged by Madrid in the hope (*inter alia*) that it would keep alive Spain's main nursery of mariners.²⁹

The impact on the City of London of this first phase of systematic corsair activity was dramatic. In 1601 it was claimed in the House of Commons that Flemish raiders had inflicted more damage on English commerce than the whole French navy during the course of the sixteenth century. The MPs for Yarmouth and Sandwich begged for more naval protection against the onslaught.³⁰ In 1595, apparently by the use of 'galleys', the Spanish Dunkirkers staged a series of landings in Cornwall, spreading panic along the south coast. Nothing could prevail upon Elizabeth I to parole or ransom the governor of

²³ 'Cargo que se le hace de bajeles ...' and 'Relacion de Artilleria ... el año de 1598 ... que trujo a su cargo el gnl. Martin de Bertendona', (by M. de Fourlaux), AGS/CMC 1038.

²⁴ 'Relation de toutes les prises venues à la notice de siège en Dunquerque doit le premier de Sept. 98 jusques ce 16 Juin 99', ARB/CA 59. (See also *liasse* no. 60.)

²⁵ Pollentier, *De Admiraliteit*, pp. 74–5.

²⁶ 'Tanteo del dinero que es menester ...' (?1600), ARB/CA 89, *liasse* 80. The estimated costs of each vessel at the launch stage at 6,400 *escudos* is broadly in line with other contemporary figures (see Appendix 8, p. 253).

²⁷ Corbett, *Successors*, p. 299.

²⁸ H. G. R. Reade, *Sidelights on the Thirty Years' War* (3 vols., London, 1924), I, 9–15.

²⁹ MN/Vargas 3, ff. 42–3 and 49ff.

³⁰ J. Waylen, *The House of Cromwell and the Story of Dunkirk* (London, 1880), pp. iii–iv; Corbett, *Successors*, pp. 359–61.

Failure and retrenchment, 1568–1621

Dunkirk, Francisco de Aguilar, after his capture at sea in 1598.³¹ Her admiral, Mansell, got the better of a force of six Flanders galleys off the Goodwins in 1600. But the fact that, shortly afterwards, she commissioned the building of four war-galleys of her own, argues that the Queen was not altogether convinced by the superficial implications of this success.³²

Likewise, the effect of the Dunkirkers' raids was already being registered on the commercial seismographs of the Dutch Republic. A determined land offensive was launched against the Flanders ports in 1600.³³ The attack was stemmed outside Nieuwpoort, but with a level of loss amongst the ranks of the army of Flanders which Madrid considered unacceptable. Indeed, the damage to the military establishment engendered an atmosphere of crisis in the Council of State, and emergency measures were taken to supply men and money in quality, not to mention a senior military figure who could assist the Archduke personally in the one area where he was clearly regarded as deficient.³⁴ Within a year, Ambrogio Spínola had arrived in the Low Countries, in effect as commander-in-chief of the army of Flanders. There he joined Federigo, who a little earlier had sailed nine galleys from the Mediterranean to Dunkirk, outrunning the Dutch squadron which he met in the Channel.³⁵

As Ambrogio's army besieged Ostend, the Madrid Council of State was engaged in one of its periodic exercises in overall reassessment of the war. The government was taking an interest in the proposals put forward by the Basque expert Juan de Gauna, based on early mercantilist thinking, for an economic campaign. Gauna's thesis elaborated a belief in the autarkic potential of the Spanish Monarchy, recommending use of its bureaucratic and military apparatus to deny the Dutch access to the waters and resources of those parts of Europe which Spain influenced or controlled. The focal point of this blockade was the Spanish Netherlands, and its expression was to be not only a newly-created customs inspectorate in Spain, but a new navy in Flanders established to enforce the policy. Gauna was the founder of what one historian has called 'a Biscayan school' of macroeconomic strategic thinkers and administrators, whose ideas relied upon the development of intimate co-operation at many levels between Spain and loyal Netherlands.³⁶

³¹ J. Dams (ed.), *Les Actes en espagnol du Magistrat de Dunkerque, 1594–1663*, (Dunkirk, 1980), pp. 5 and 18. I place the quotation marks here because of my own suspicion that, before 1599, casual observers may have mistaken Flemish 'frigate' prototypes (in which banks of oars were prominent) for true Mediterranean galleys.

³² R. C. Anderson, *Oared Sailing Ships* (London, 1962), p. 84.

³³ H. Malo, *Les Corsaires: Les Corsaires Dunkerquois et Jean Bart* (2 vols., Paris, 1913), I, 241–3; L. Lemaire, *Histoire de Dunkerque des origines à 1900* (Dunkirk, 1927), pp. 127–8.

³⁴ See the *consultas* of summer 1600, printed (from AGS/E 793) by M. de Alcocer (ed.), *Colección de Documentos inéditos para la Historia de España y sus Indias* (4 vols., Valladolid, 1930–2), III, 32–52.

³⁵ For the exploits of Federigo, see R. Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spínola, primer Marqués de Los Balbases* (Madrid, 1905), pp. 19–50.

³⁶ M. A. Echevarría, 'Un notable episodio en la guerra económica Hispano-Holandesa: El decreto Gauna (1603)', *Hispania* 46 (1986), pp. 57–97.

The search for a naval policy

About this time, however, one school of ministerial thought, exhausted and frustrated by the perpetual struggle, favoured negotiations, with a view to at least a truce. In the Council of State such feelings were expressed by the veteran councillor – also a Basque – Juan de Idiáquez. Though he sympathised with his colleague's main objective of obtaining a lengthy respite, the marquis of Velada, perhaps already familiar with Gauna's thinking, argued that a only a renewed commitment to military pressure could lead to satisfactory political developments. Above all, Velada argued,

it would be very appropriate to reinforce the armada of Dunkirk [and utilise it] in order to deprive the enemy of the herring fisheries. This could be achieved at relatively little cost compared to the damage it might perform. Fishing is the major support of most of the Dutch communities, and is therefore a way in which great influence can be exerted on those who rule them. [The Marquis] understands that such tactics can be carried on with only ten or twelve warships of 200–300 tons, able in the right circumstances to destroy the rebels' entire fishing fleet, made up as it is of craft which can neither fight nor flee.

Impressed by this scenario, Philip III authorised a new military initiative: 'Let us take the war to them with blood and fire, as far as their very homes, both by land and sea. The armada of Dunkirk should be strengthened and let loose against their fisheries, along with the galleys of Federigo'.³⁷

Naval historians now accept that Federigo's flotilla made a powerful impact.³⁸ They were a fully autonomous force ('las galeras de Flandes'), with its own officials and *tercio de infantería*.³⁹ Despite being checked by Mansell, they later acquitted themselves well in several brushes with the Dutch, during the manoeuvrings connected with the prolonged siege of Ostend. They constantly harried Dutch attempts to supply the port by sea. In one encounter, the Spanish marines boarded the enemy flagship and lowered its standard before being driven off by reinforcements. Had it not been for the death in action of their commander (1603) the galleys might have justified the confidence of many experts in their aptitude for the Low Countries' environment. Even as it was, their actions – though certainly to be seen in conjunction with those of the local elements whose port they shared – represented the first major contribution that organised naval power had made to the war in the Netherlands. In November 1603, Ambrogio Spínola recognised this when he rewarded with their liberty the galley-slaves who had served with the squadron. Others were not so fortunate. The galley *San Felipe*, wrecked with only ten survivors on the sandbanks of Flanders, was one symbol of a campaign which eventually obtained the fall of Ostend (1604) but only at the cost of enormous sacrifices in men and resources.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Consulta* of council of state and royal *apostilla*, 26 Nov. 1602, Alcocer, *Documentos*, pp. 252–81.

³⁸ See (e.g.) R. Gray, 'Spinola's Galleys in the Narrow Seas, 1600' *MM* 64 (1978), pp. 71–83; Fernández-Armesto, *The Armada*, pp. 127–8; and cf. Corbett, *Successors*, pp. 386–95.

³⁹ For official material pertaining to its affairs, see ARB/SEG 124, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Certificates by F. Spínola, 14 Jan. 1603; order by A. Spínola, 6 Nov. 1603, *ibid.*, ff. 1–2 and 91 (see also f. 53). See also Albert to Philip II, 17 Dec. 1611, *ibid.* 177, ff. 101–2.